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Christine Everaert's *Tracing the Boundaries  
Between Hindi and Urdu*  
(Review Article)

DESPITE THE DIFFERENCE OF SCRIPT—Urdu is customarily written in the Perso-Arabic *nasta'liq* and *naskh* scripts and Hindi in the Devanagari script—Urdu and Hindi form a composite literary culture. Linguistically and culturally, Hindi may even be considered closer to Urdu than to Brajhasha and Avadhi (Trivedi 2003, 960), two languages which are often favored by Hindi nationalists as literary predecessors of Hindi. But what Christopher King has termed “one language, two scripts” (1994) is no less a contested linguistic and cultural statement than it is a political and ideological one. There exist different viewpoints on whether the lexical and digraphic differences of Urdu and Hindi suffice to demarcate the boundaries between the two languages. True, in higher literary registers as well as for high society, and for legal, administrative and religious terminology, Urdu borrows from Perso-Arabic whereas Hindi frequently draws on Sanskrit. Writers of both languages, however, also freely use such registers as a literary device rather than a linguistic determinant. Then, there is the “poisonous potency of script” (R. King 2001) that all too frequently creates schism in a language which shares building blocks such as grammar, syntax and lexic. Christine Everaert is well aware of the linguistic and ideological debates centering on Urdu and Hindi since the nineteenth century. She uses medical terminology which defines the relationship of both languages as that of Siamese twins, “the separation of which would involve major surgery” (14),<sup>1</sup> to add her spin to the ongoing debates.

From the outset, Everaert is confronted with the complexities and politics of terminologies as they result from the extreme Urdu-Hindi digraphia, the two scripts in which Urdu and Hindi may be written, and both languages' complex intertwined history, including the efforts of Urdu and Hindi

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<sup>1</sup>All references to the text are from Everaert (2010).

editors and writers as well as Muslim and Hindu nationalist politicians in colonial and postcolonial society to stake out distinct genealogies and literary canons for either language. Though interested in “Tracing the Boundaries between Hindi and Urdu,” thus the main title of Everaert’s monograph, she does not intend to draw clear borders between both languages, even though it may appear that the terminology at hand hardly gives her a choice. After all, half of the twenty-four short stories analyzed by Everaert exist in two versions termed Urdu and Hindi, while the other twelve, though not bilingual, equally succumb to the politics of digraphia: they are termed according to the corresponding script in which they were first published, even though, Everaert courageously posits, an Urdu short story could also be termed Hindi when disregarding the script in which it was published (13).

It is for this purpose that in her book Everaert seeks to inquire about the *relationship* of Hindi and Urdu (and not Hindi-Urdu) short stories. A linguistic study with receptivity towards the aspects of the composite literary culture of Urdu and Hindi serves such an objective well. Chapter three offers a thorough linguistic analysis of the bilingual short stories, which is then succinctly summarized in Chapter four. Based on morpho-syntactic changes (the *izāfat*-construction, singular versus plural, the *kō* and *kā* postpositions, the adjective *jaisā*, verbal changes in tense and changes of auxiliary verbs), syntactic changes (sentence structure, punctuation, use of pronouns, negators, the emphatic and enclitic particles *hī* and *bhī*, and numerals), lexical changes (Perso-Arabic versus Sanskrit and other changes), and changes in orthography and phonology, Everaert comes to the conclusion that there do exist minor differences between Urdu and Hindi from a grammatical point of view. These do not suffice, however, to serve as indicators of grammatical divergence between Urdu and Hindi. A detailed analysis of the Urdu *izāfat*-construction as employed in the short stories at hand, for example, reveals that this generally acknowledged Urdu grammatical feature is not necessarily “the standard alternative” for the Hindi *kā*-construction and even finds limited use in modern Urdu texts (226). Moreover, Everaert posits convincingly that the *izāfat*-construction has become a feature more of *lexical* than grammatical borrowing in Hindi texts that wish to highlight aspects of Islamic culture in their stories (*ibid.*).

This and other conclusions as they emerge from Everaert’s linguistic analysis of the bilingual short stories serve as indicators of minor grammatical divergences between Urdu and Hindi and, she acknowledges, necessitate further research on the topic. And yet, these “gaps” of knowledge do not diminish her endeavor. On the contrary, by sharing the challenges she encountered during her research, the book becomes amenable, unpretentious and authentic. Moreover, her study does not end at

this point, as she also seeks to shed light on the ways creative writers situated themselves in the language debates of the twentieth century: Does their work reflect “patterns of convergence or divergence” in Urdu and Hindi on other, literary, levels, and to what extent may their stylistic and lexical choices have been politically and ideologically motivated? She rightfully recognizes that any attempt seeking to identify a boundary of Urdu and Hindi is at the most artificial. Hence her attempt to

investigate how the authors of these short stories respond to the linguistic divide in their writing. Did they increase language divergence in order to differentiate their language from “the other community”? Or did some authors try to bridge the gap? Do the short stories in the corpus indicate a linguistic Partition as well, mirroring political developments?

(4–5)

The answers to such questions necessitate an analysis not only of the texts at hand, but also their sociological and biographical contexts, as it takes place cautiously in Chapter two.

### The Authors and the Genre

Today, the literary canons of both Urdu and Hindi lay claim to a writer such as Munshi Premchand (1880–1936), who is widely acknowledged as the father of the Urdu *and* Hindi short story and novel. Somewhat more complicated is the matter of Urdu writers such as Sa‘ādat Ḥasan Manṭō (1912–1955) and Qurratu’l-‘Ain Ḥaidar (1927–2007) who were born and raised in what would become India after the Partition of the Subcontinent, but who are primarily recognized as Pakistani writers. Neither ever broke their cultural ties and allegiances with Indian/South Asian composite literary culture and, when read aloud, their language would hardly serve to be identified as anything other than a hyphenated Hindi-Urdu by a listener. It is perhaps also due to the subject matter—as both authors write about the Partition of British India—that their writings enjoy popularity in Pakistan and India and are available in both scripts. On the other hand, the short stories of eminent Urdu and Hindi writers such as Sajjād Ḥaidar Yildirim (1880–1943), a contemporary of Munshi Premchand and the father of Qurratu’l-‘Ain Ḥaidar, Becan Sharma Pandey Ugra (1900–1967) and Mohan Rakesh (1925–1972) are associated with only one literary canon and are not even available in the script of the other, despite the fact that the content would certainly speak to the “other” community (11). What accounts for the lack of exchange in one set of authors and what is the linguistic and cultural relationship of

the bilingual stories of the other grouping? Such are the questions posed by Everaert who offers a clearly structured linguistic and cultural analysis of three short stories each, authored by four Urdu and four Hindi writers. Twelve short stories belong to the bilingual corpus, that is, they are available in both Urdu and Hindi language and script. With her selection, Everaert covers literary productions stemming from almost the entire twentieth century (1901–1989). Her authors belong to different time periods of British Indian, Pakistani and Indian history. Munshi Premchand (Urdu and Hindi), Becan Sharma Pandey Ugra (Hindi) and Sajjād Ḥaidar ‘Yıldırım’ (Urdu) wrote during the colonial period. Sa‘ādat Ḥasan Maṅṭō (Urdu) and Mohan Rakesh (Hindi), writers of the 1940s and 1950s, witnessed the last stages of the Independence struggle, the Partition of British India, as well as the early years of two independent nation-states occupied with laying out their respective and separate national identities. ‘Abdu’l-Bismillāh (b. 1949, Hindi), Sampuran Singh Kalra Gulzar (b. 1934, Urdu) and Qurratu’l-‘Ain Ḥaidar (Urdu), the only female author discussed in this study, belong to a literary era marked by the Na’ī Kahānī Movement of the 1960s. This last grouping of authors complicates the simplistic alignment of Hindu writers with Hindi language and Muslim writers with Urdu since ‘Abdu’l-Bismillāh is a Muslim-Hindi writer and Sampuran Singh Kalra Gulzar is a Sikh writer in Urdu. In her doctoral dissertation, Ulrike Stark (1990) operated in the category of the (male) Muslim writer in Hindi and investigated the impact of the Hindi-Urdu literary and linguistic controversy for the literary scene of the pre- and postcolonial decades. Both innovative studies are complementary, with Stark moving in the direction of a linguistic-literary and socio-psychological analysis, whereas Everaert brings the linguistic and socio-cultural dimension as well as the aspect of translation into play.

Everaert has given careful thought to her choice of genre, that is, the short story, which emerged in South Asia in the early twentieth century and flourished in the 1950s and 1960s. “Overall, I felt that the short story genre was closest to representing moderate, grammatically correct language, without being subject to politically motivated language manipulation” (3), she writes. Apart from the relatively young short story, earlier prose and poetry genres such as those “intermediary genres” analyzed in a collection of essays edited by Francesca Orsini and centering on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—thus composed “before the divide” (Orsini 2010)—are also occupied with the question of the relationship of Urdu and Hindi literary production. Everaert’s study continues along the same trajectory, albeit with a focus on a linguistic rather than literary analysis. As soon as she began selecting the short stories for her study, she confronted the extensive “grey zone” (4) of what was supposed to be the boundary be-

tween Urdu and Hindi literary production, a zone that has also been repeatedly pointed to in the respective essays in Orsini's collection. Moreover, the process of cultural and linguistic translation set in with the release of a short story. The boundaries between Urdu and Hindi began to blur the very moment that a short story in *nasta'liq* or *naskh* script was transliterated into the Devanagari script and vice versa. This recognition propels Everaert into an investigation of the linguistic and cultural factors that led to the distinction between Urdu and Hindi as separate languages.

### The Language(s)

Everaert perceptively begins her quest in the first chapter with an investigation of grammars and language courses as they were published from the nineteenth century onward.

On the one hand, I wanted to see the extent to which the older publications titled "Hindi," "Urdu" or "Hindustani" match the languages we now denote with these names. On the other hand, I wanted to verify what happened to the contents of the books when a Hindi and Urdu edition of the same book appeared, or when a "Hindustani" or "Urdu" grammar or course was renamed after Partition. Did only the title change or did the language described also change?

(4)

This chapter concludes that the perception of Urdu and Hindi to the majority of grammarians and linguists (including Thomas G. Bailey, Ronald S. McGregor and Rupert Snell) may rightfully be termed Hindi-Urdu. Against this background, we may also understand why several universities and colleges in North America, including the University of California-Berkeley, the University of Texas at Austin, the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill), Columbia University (New York) and York University (Toronto), to give a small selection, hyphenate their programs and language courses as "Hindi-Urdu" or mark them with a diagonal "Hindi/Urdu."

In the nineteenth century, the shared literary culture of Urdu and Hindi fell prey to British colonial language policies as well as Muslim and Hindu communal and nationalist quests for a distinct linguistic genealogy and literary canon. Consequently, Urdu was increasingly defined as the language of Muslims and Hindi as the language of Hindus, notwithstanding North Indian shared linguistic and cultural traditions. But this dichotomization was subject to constant negotiation even in the second half of the twentieth century, when not only Muslim authors such as 'Abdu'l-Bismillāh and Rāhī

Ma‘šūm Razā, amongst others, chose to publish their fiction in Hindi (and subsequently in Urdu) without abandoning a distinct Urdu idiom (Dalmia 2003, 1381–82). Everaert draws from a bilingual corpus whenever it is available, which in the process of translation into the respective other language underwent changes to the script, title and morpho-syntactic features, and occasionally even endings were modified. This and other seeming conundrums “lost and added in translation between twentieth century short stories,” thus the subtitle of the monograph, are uncovered in Everaert’s thoughtful and unpretentious analysis. It is indeed bewildering that the Urdu version of the short story by Premchand titled “Apnā Apnā Khayāl” ends at an earlier point than does its Hindi pendant titled “Manovritti,” with the result that the denouement of the Hindi version (i.e., the revelation that the young woman sleeping on a park bench is innocent and not a prostitute, as some passersby speculate), is either missing in the Urdu version or may have been added to the Hindi version, depending on which version was composed first. Perhaps the last page of the Urdu translation was simply lost, but such an explanation does not prove convincing for reasons laid out by Everaert (43–47). She instead argues that the different endings were deliberate and caused by the author’s and/or translator’s (presumably Premchand himself) consideration of the differing reading tastes of Urdu and Hindi audiences (47–48). Urdu fiction is often more poetic and nuanced, whereas Hindi fiction tends to be more didactic (228), especially in the case of Premchand’s early oeuvre, which would also explain the additional page in “Manovritti.” While Everaert’s elaborations remain speculative, they contribute to the important task of identifying the reading habits and preferences of twentieth-century readers.

### The Book and CD-ROM

It is to the credit of Everaert that she aspires to the greatest transparency regarding her source materials and analyses throughout the book. First, she makes use of an accompanying CD-ROM to overcome the space restrictions of a printed book and avoid a bulky appendix. While the book may well be digested and appear complete even without the CD-ROM, this compact medium allows for making available English translations of all the short stories discussed in the book. In addition, the bilingual short stories (but not the short stories available in only one of the languages) appear there in Urdu and Hindi transliteration. Unfortunately, the short stories do not appear in the original *nasta‘liq* or *naskh* and Devanagari scripts, which many a reader of Urdu and Hindi might have preferred.

And yet, even this decision in favor of transliteration has been taken after careful consideration that the readers of Urdu and/or Hindi are often only familiar with one of the scripts, whereas transliterated renderings, though not particularly appealing to those who are familiar with the original script, are accessible to even those who are not familiar with one or both scripts. The bilingual versions run parallel on the CD-ROM document, which facilitates a sentence-by-sentence linguistic comparison and makes it easy to follow the linguistic analysis provided by Everaert in Chapter three. All of the short stories are furthermore rendered into literary English, although regrettably these impeccable translations are not linked to the original texts, which hampers any effort to compare the original with the translation. Instead, the translations are accompanied by numerous annotations. This combination of original, translation (into Urdu or Hindi and English) and annotation makes the book together with its CD-ROM an excellent source of teaching material for language (intermediate and advanced Hindi-Urdu), literature (Premchand, Manṭō, Ḥaidar, etc.) and Hindi-Urdu socio-linguistics courses.

Second, the author has clearly positioned herself and her work within its possibilities and limitations. At all points, she clearly indicates whenever the lack of evidence from primary background materials (such as the unavailability of the author's own words, editor's remarks, translator's comments, reader reviews, etc.) and the lack of knowledge about a work's publication date, its translator and which version of a bilingual short story was composed first, forces her to provide self-made explanations that seem plausible to her and for which the primary sources along with the socio-cultural background she has acquired provide evidence. Moreover, she is fully aware that translation need not always be transparent or literal, especially not when authors themselves translate their writing, as is the case with Premchand, who is known for freely adding content to the translation and omitting from his original text. One important argument of the book in fact emerges from precisely this uncertainty and doubt whether the differences in the Urdu and Hindi bilingual texts can at all be attributed to linguistics alone or whether they are not caused by the vicissitudes of linguistic and cultural translation and the stylistic preferences of the individual translator.

With her approach, Everaert intervenes exquisitely in the question of the relationship between the Urdu and Hindi language(s) and literary culture(s) as it has long occupied not only scholars of languages, literatures, literary history and linguistics, but also politicians and policy makers. In order to not reiterate what has already been narrated and analyzed by other scholars, and to stay focused on her own contribution to the field,

an overview of the history of Urdu and Hindi is located conveniently in the appendix of the book. Here we read that while some literary and political actors as well as scholars emphasized the shared historical, cultural and linguistic grounds of Urdu and Hindi, others emphasized the distinctiveness of each language with regard to script, canon, lexicon, and even religious identity. There is no doubt that this monograph is not only innovative and elucidating, it brings readers closer to the sociolinguistic and cultural identities of Urdu, Hindi and Hindi-Urdu, their common history and relationship after “the divide,” that is, when the historical, cultural and political divisions between the two languages overrode the once shared literary culture.

### Urdu, Hindi and Hindi-Urdu in the Classroom

The questions raised by the author with regard to the relationship of Hindi and Urdu and the conclusions she offers through her study may well find their way into the post-secondary classroom where Hindi and/or Urdu language, literature and culture are taught. When laying out the university curriculum of a language program that spans the introductory, intermediate and advanced levels, educators need to consider from the onset how they conceptualize the intersections and the boundaries between Urdu and Hindi. A scholar investigating Urdu and/or Hindi course materials may come to the conclusion that even separate programs for Urdu and Hindi may not differ in terms of the actual language (as opposed to the script) used in the classroom. Two items widely used as instructional materials, Usha Jain’s *Introduction to Hindi Grammar* (Berkeley 1995) and the comprehensive online course materials *A Door into Hindi* (<http://taj.chass.ncsu.edu/>) that has been designed under the leadership of Afroz Taj at the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill), exist in translation (albeit the *Introduction to Urdu Grammar* has yet to be published). Afroz Taj explains in the introductory notes to *Darvazah: A Door into Urdu*:

Darvazah has a sister site: [A Door Into Hindi](#) for those wishing to learn Hindi. Unlike many currently available textbooks, we have not attempted to differentiate between “Hindi” and “Urdu” linguistic contexts. Hindi and Urdu are the same language in their day-to-day spoken forms (although they use different alphabets). Occasional vocabulary words may appear strange when used in the “wrong” context (e.g. “namaste” in Pakistan), but we believe that the alternative, an attempted segregation of Hindi and Urdu, would be misleading and detrimental to our learners’ objectives.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>See web site at <http://taj.chass.ncsu.edu/urdu/about.html>.



In line with this perception of the relationship between the Urdu and Hindi languages, the chapter videos for the Urdu and Hindi materials are one and the same. They are accompanied by explanatory “Communication and Culture” notes that lay out, for example, different greeting forms used in specific Urdu and Hindi contexts. Columbia University describes its approach in language classes as follows:

We call our programme Hindi/Urdu. At the beginning level, the students learn Devnagari. But we make sure they learn Hindi/Urdu vocabulary. For example *dost/mitra* [friend], *kitab/pustak* [book]. Most of it is common vocabulary anyway. We do not teach very Sanskritised Hindi. Urdu script is introduced in Intermediate Hindi [...]

[...]

From the fifth semester onwards, we provide separate classes in Hindi and Urdu to enable [students] to read and comprehend literary and other texts comprising technical vocabulary.

(Bedi 2002, 176–77)

These elaborations are limited to educational institutions in North America and do not reflect the language policies in practice in Pakistan and India, where Hindi and Urdu, respectively, do not find their due place in the curriculum. In the Indian public education system, Urdu is not recognized as a language of instruction and those speakers of Urdu who wish to pass on their mother-tongue in a formal educational setting are impelled to turn to specific Muslim institutions such as madrasas, notwithstanding their right for primary education in the mother-tongue as established in the Constitution of India (Farouqui 2006, 1). In Pakistan, with Urdu as the national language, Hindi, has no formal recognition, but does indeed enter the public domain through cable television which increasingly offers Hindi-dubbed, rather than English channels, in order to cater to larger audiences, much to the dismay of some parents in Pakistan observing the increasing use of Hindi vocabulary by their children (Tahir 2012, n.p.). Maintaining the Hindi-Urdu continuum is a complicated matter in India and Pakistan state policies as well as in the respective public spheres. It may therefore be even more of a responsibility for Western university curricula to emphasize Urdu and Hindi composite linguistic and literary culture. Even at Western academic institutions, language instructors may face student reluctance about learning “the other’s” script—as witnessed at York University in Toronto. The question of Hindi and Urdu once again returns to the problem arising from the extreme Urdu-Hindi digraphia.

According to a pamphlet distributed by the Modern Language Association, *Language Study in the Age of Globalization* (n.d.), language and literature must be studied in historical, political, and cultural contexts,

alerting students that languages are embedded within their cultures and possess their specific bodies of literature. In the case of Urdu and Hindi, this statement requires some modification, provided both languages are acknowledged as separate languages with a composite literary culture. The awareness of this relationship has the potential of developing students' sensitivity and awareness of linguistic and cultural differences despite shared grammatical and lexical markers. Linguistic competence becomes even more important as it bears upon cultural competence. If the *kā*, *kē*, *kī* postpositions commonly used in Hindi (and introduced in introductory Hindi-Urdu) are complemented with the Urdu-specific *izāfat*-construction in intermediate Hindi-Urdu, students may make culturally informed choices with regard to their usage. At the same time, commonalities of Urdu and Hindi that mark the languages as culturally intertwined and that distinguish their linguistic features from English or other languages need to also be highlighted in the language classroom:

(1) Hindi-Urdu operates with three second-person pronouns (and not just a single "you").

(2) Certain verbs in Hindi-Urdu are indirect constructions and require that the English subject of a sentence become the grammatical object followed by the postposition *kō* (hence, "I like x" turns into "x is liked by/to me" or "I know x" turns into "x is known to me").

(3) Hindi-Urdu commonly uses a specific conjunctive participle *kar* in lieu of the conjunction "and," provided the subject of both phrases is the same.

(4) The formation of the perfect tense of transitive verbs in Hindi-Urdu requires a construction (the *nē*-construction) that has no equivalent in English and that blocks the subject-verb grammatical agreement.

These linguistic particularities of Hindi-Urdu together with the linguistic specifics of Urdu and Hindi serve to sensitize students to the linguistic *and* cultural features of a composite literary culture that is articulated in two languages. More important than "tracing the boundaries between Hindi and Urdu" is that students recognize both languages within cultural contexts (and Everaert would certainly agree with this statement). Rather than trying to capture languages with electronic translation devices, students should therefore be encouraged to make grammatical, lexical and thus stylistic and cultural choices by identifying and applying Urdu, Hindi and Hindi-Urdu specific linguistic tools of expression. While interrogating the specifics and relationship of linguistic and cultural features, language acquisition acquires meaning in translingual and transcultural contexts. This is useful in classrooms that consist of heritage learners as well as (graduate and undergraduate) students with no South Asian language or culture

background.

Up to this day, writers, literary associations and literary festivals negotiate the composite literary culture and language of Urdu and Hindi. The Janwadi Lekhak Sangh (Democratic/People's Writers Association), also called the Anjuman Jamhūriyat-Pasand Muşannifin, for example, offers an interesting case study of an All-India association of Hindi *and* Urdu writers: Established in 1982 with its headquarters in Delhi and regional branches spread across different Indian states, the association took an explicit stance against the communalization of the composite literary culture and has since organized numerous "resistance conventions" at which writers, artists, cultural activists and academics protest Hindutva right-wing politics and ideologies.<sup>3</sup> Today, the association prides itself on being the largest collective of leftist Urdu and Hindi writers in India. The association's mouthpiece is the Hindi literary journal *Nayā Pāth* (New Path), which is occasionally also published in the Urdu script and which always includes writings in Hindi translation from a variety of Indian vernacular languages, including Urdu. It seems therefore that Everaert's study may also be understood in the light of a literary development that has bypassed the hyphenated emphasis on Urdu and Hindi in order to recognize and put emphasis on literary expression in a variety of South Asian languages, including Urdu and Hindi, that may be accessed by means of translation. The availability of carefully undertaken and often institutionally funded literary translations from South Asian languages into other South Asian languages and English has also immensely facilitated the teaching of South Asian literatures in the classroom. □

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<sup>3</sup>See the Association web site at <http://www.jlsindia.org/activities.htm>.

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